McNamara 'Ashamed' Of School Ills

By Richard Severo
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Defense Secretary Robert McNamara gave the Senate Foreign Relations Committee some grim facts about Washington's public school system yesterday.

What's more, he had an excellent source for his information: his wife.

McNamara, nearing the end of his testimony, was making the point that America's failure to resolve some of its social ills should not be linked to the Military Assistance Program.

"In this District of Columbia today there are 50 elementary schools without libraries," McNamara said.

"I think it's disgraceful, and as a citizen I am ashamed of it. But I don't think cutting

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McNamara Calls City's

the Military Assistance Program is going to get 50 libraries for elementary schools.

"In the District of Columbia today," he continued, "the book allowance, other than textbooks, is 50 cents per pupil per year. It's disgraceful.

"We are sowing the seeds of future social unrest right in our Capital, but not because of the Military Assistance Program," McNamara said.

McNamara continued:

"So I would hope that we will act to face the problems we do (face) in our urban areas. That we will act to face the poverty that exists. But I don't think that we can do so by cutting back the military budgets.

"It isn't money we lack; it's will we lack. We are an affluent Nation. Our gross national product will exceed $700 billion this year. We can afford whatever we need for military security and we can afford it when we begin to attack the socials ills and we ought to do it today—not waste another day to so so."

McNamara has no children in the public school system, but he has every reason to be aware of the shortcomings of the school libraries. His wife is working long and hard to remedy them.

"Yes, it's true, I talk about the school situation all the time," Mrs. McNamara told a reporter later. She has been active in Operation Head Start and the D.C. Citizens for Better Education.

"But frankly, I'm surprised he remembered the statistics, along with all the other things he remembers."

School Ills a Disgrace

When reached by telephone she was in a hurry (on her way to the airport to meet an arriving plane) but not in too much of a hurry to talk about the need for good school libraries.

"It's terrible," she said. "You know, an awful lot of youngsters in the District simply can't afford to buy books. And their interest in reading certainly isn't going to be increased by the textbooks they get."

She said that many children in the District school system are actually two years behind in their reading level, a situation she is sure can be corrected — if schools get well-stocked libraries.

When reminded that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee isn't officially concerned with Washington's public schools system, Mrs. McNamara said: "Hmmm. Wonder if any of them would be interested in the D.C. Citizens for Better Education?"